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Promoting Acceptance & Well-Being for Transgender People Through Outreach & Education

INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR GENDER EDUCATION (IFGE) ANNOUNCES PLANS FOR TRANSGENDER 2010 THE CAPITAL CONFERENCE, THE OFFICIAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF IFGE

During the final session of Transgender 2009, IFGE's official annual conference, Bree Hartlage, the newly-elected Chair of the IFGE Board of Directors, announced that the 2010 edition of the IFGE conference will be held once again in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

"It was quite apparent to both myself and the rest of our Board that the only logical place for the transgender community to gather each year in the name of education and acceptance is in our nation's capital," noted Ms. Hartlage, who also announced that Transgender 2010 - The Capital Conference, will be moving back to it's traditional April time slot, with specific dates and location to be announced very soon.

With respect to the recently-concluded 2009 conference, which drew approximately 150 attendees and speakers from around the country, Ms. Hartlage praised the efforts of IFGE Executive Director, Denise Leclair, "I am extremely grateful to Denise for all of her hard work and determination in staging the 2009 conference despite very long odds."

As with past conferences, the program of over 60 workshops drew high praise from those seeking to better understand the many varied aspects of what it means to be transgender in today's society. "I want to acknowledge the tireless work of all our volunteers, especially those from our local host organization, TGEA, The Transgender Education Association of Greater Washington, for making this a highly successful conference - we couldn't have done this without each and every one of you," said Ms. Leclair.

The annual conference is a primary means of meeting the IFGE mission of "Promoting Acceptance for Transgender People Through Education." For information on how to become a member of IFGE and make a donation, please visit: http://www.ifge.org.

The International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE), with offices in Waltham, MA and Washington, DC, is a non-profit advocacy organization founded in 1987. Its purpose is overcoming the intolerance of transvestitism and transsexualism brought about by widespread ignorance. Since its founding, it has provided outreach through education for the emancipation of all gender variant people from restrictive gender norms. It is a registered non-profit educational corporation and is recognized by the I.R.S. as a 501c(3) charitable organization.

The Transgender Education Association of Greater Washington, Inc. (TGEA) provides a supportive environment for transgender individuals to understand and accept their lifestyle through day-to-day assistance, peer counseling and/or referral to professional, institutional, and other appropriate resources. TGEA helps transgender individuals overcome their sense of isolation by providing appropriate educational and social opportunities.

"Promoting Acceptance for Transgender People Everywhere Through Education"

The International Foundation for Gender Education is a 501(c)3 charitable organization.

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Inle Lake, Burma — Photograph by Mariette Pathy Allen

Transgender
TAPESTRY

ISSUE #115

The Journol of the Internotianol Foundatian for Gender Educotion

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GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Transgender Tapestry is a magazine for and about crossdressers, transgendered, transsexual, intersexed, and other gender-variant persons, and those who support them.

Our Readers

Write for a general audience. Our readers include closeted and out people: crossdressers, transsexuals, transgenderists, intersexed persons, gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, heterosexuals, therapists, physicians, ministers, spouses and significant others, family members, and friends. Our readers span all ages, races, nationalities, religions, spiritualities, beliefs and opinions, and educational backgrounds. Your piece may be targeted for one group, but it should speak to the larger readership.

We want writing that challenges categories, presumptions, and accepted thought.

How To Submit

The best way to send materials is via e-mail. We get it immediately and we don't have to retype it.

Send your submissions to: editor@ifge.org. Attach a file, using MIME encoding. These formats are acceptable for text files: Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, Rich Text Files (RTF), and Text. Please name your file so it makes sense to us, and for goodness sakes, be sure to include your name and contact information with text files. A file named "Tapestry" doesn't tell us much! Much better to use "John Smith Poem" or "Martha Michaelson Submission."

It's okay to send text in the body of an e-mail, but our Eudora Light mail reader doesn't recognize embedded codes.

Graphic images should be high-resolution TIFF or EPS format, saved at 300dpi and submitted to the editor (address below) on Zip disk or CD-R. Please include your return address if you would like your materials returned to you. If you prefer to send images in BMP, GIF, or JPG format—although they are easy to send via e-mail, please know the quality of your image will be severely compromised by the printing process.

Unless they're self-extracting, please don't send zipped files without clearing it with us beforehand. No e-mail? Send a PC-compatible or MAC floppy to Tapestry Editor, P.O. Box 540229, Waltham, MA 02454-0229.

We hate typing in text, but we understand some people can't afford or don't like computers, so believe it or not, we accept articles on paper. Please include a brief biography with your submission.

What To Send Us

We want original material. We rarely accept simultaneous or previously published submissions. We're interested in ideas which have been previously under-explored. We accept submissions on gender issues of general interest, including: new (for some people) types of diversity; little-known information about transgender history; under-utilized resources and populations; personal struggles; social or medical issues; humor with an underlying message; and satire.

Things We Shouldn't Have To Say

DO send us stuff. Deadlines are firm. Contact us before submitting. Talk with us before writing, if possible. Let us know what you want to do and when you can deliver it. Send us a rough draft if you have one. Be reliable. Make your word stick. Be concise. Don't ramble, and don't try to tackle too much in one article.

Don't be heartbroken if we don't use your submission. A rejection often has more to do with the theme or the space available in the magazine than the quality of the writing.

Fore Word

"May you live in interesting times" is reputed to be an ancient curse, and the past year has certainly been the most interesting one I can recall.

The world has changed so much over the last year that in many ways it has become hard to recognize. Some of these changes have been positively amazing: I never dreamed I would live to see a President of the United States who was not a white male, nor did I think we would ever see 2-dollar gas again. The wrecked stock market and economy are equally unrecognizable, but negatively amazing.

There are many things that have not changed, but need to: Mainstream media still portray us poorly, when they include us at all; We are still being discriminated against without recourse in most of the country; We are still being killed with outrageous frequency and brutality.

It is easy to fixate on how bad things are. Many people and organizations are really struggling to get through these lean times, and IFGE is no exception. Most non-profits are seeing a major drop in donations, and many have had to lay off staff, or even close their doors. This is especially tragic now, because many of these organizations are seeing a record demand for their services, just as their own resources are drying up.

It takes greater effort to see the opportunities that are in front of us, but there are amazing possibilities within our grasp for the first time. Hate crimes legislation that includes gender identity and gender expression is almost guaranteed to pass in the upcoming session of Congress. Many legislators feel that passing this bill is a prerequisite for getting any kind of protection against discrimination. We all need to get behind this legislation and make sure it does get through. A lot is depending on it; we can't afford to miss this chance.

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act, or ENDA, the Holy Grail of Legislation for transgender people is also back on the table. There are many other issues that affect us, but lack of employment opportunities underlie the vast majority of them. President Obama has said he would sign an ENDA including gender identity if we can get one to his desk. Now that is real change!

IFGE has been undergoing changes of its own as well. We just held "Transgender 2009" our 23rd annual conference, in Washington DC this February. After ten years, our own staff is running it once again, rather than contracting it out to TransEvents USA Inc. Bringing our event back in house has been an overwhelming effort which consumed most of our resources and almost all of our time for the last six months.

After the split, TransEvents created a new event in Philadelphia they are calling the "Liberty Conference." This has created a great deal of confusion, as most people assumed that the new conference has some affiliation with IFGE. It does not.

Adding to that confusion is the fact that TransEvents is using our mailing list, and our conference name, "Transgender 2009." We apologize to anyone who has received unsolicited mailings from them. They do not have our permission, and we are actively working to stop this misrepresentation.

Our conference was a success nevertheless, with over sixty seminars and a full roster of speakers and entertainment. Look for full coverage of our historic 2009 conference in our upcoming issue, and planning is already underway for an even better 2010 conference in Washington DC next April. It looks like we're going to have another interesting year ahead of us.

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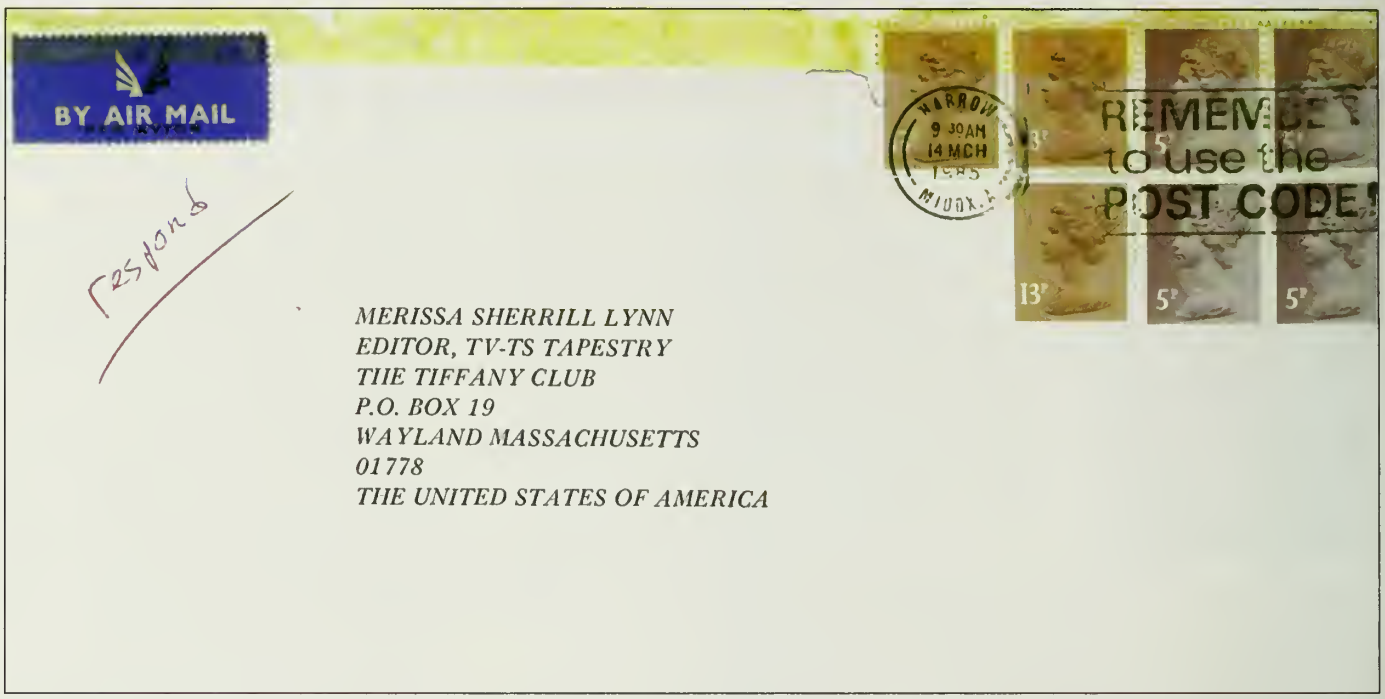

Dear Editor,

I very seldom write a letter to the editor, sorry I can't do it by email—no computer—wouldn't know what to do with it if I had one. And this probably isn't worth the bother to retype, so I won't be mad if it never makes the magazine.

In Tapestry #114, I took special notice of Alice Novic's page: "Jury Duty in a Dress" (p.11) Why? Been there -- done that. I served on Grand Jury here in Columbia County in 2006 Jan - June. I didn't have to deal with the issue of a male name vs. my female appearance. My name had been legally changed several months before. On the summons idoestt said, "appropriate dress required." So what do I do? So I called the Commissioner of Jurors office and asked, given my M - F circumstances, what is appropriate? Got no guidance whatsoever. First time; black slacks, sweater, and heels. Before long, I was (in) jeans and top and sneakers just like everyone else. Maybe in a trial jury, it might have been different. Got no guff from anyone about anything. As for did I get I get "read." Who knows? Who cares?

Later on that summer, two of the Assistant D.A.'s came to me for a handgun safety class prior to applying for their pistol permits. And one night on the way home from Albany, a trooper who had testified before us stopped and helped me change a flat tire.

I guess I'm doing OK.

Love to all,
Barbara Teter
Member # 3120, New York

Still Questioning

Labels and categories are important in helping us understand things that might take long drawn out explanations. However they can also cause a considerable amount of damage. As a part time crossdresser, one who enjoys living in either role-really not at the same time.

People keep putting me in categories with full time gender shifting people. I do not want to be a lady all the time any more than I want to be a gentleman all the time. To amalgamate me and people who want to gender shift all the time just doesn't make sense to me. Not only are my goals different but my feelings are different. I do not want to change any of my body parts. I do not want to live in the fem role all the time. I would not dream of sacrificing any friends or family members to accommodate my feelings of gender variance. When you look at the people who go full time their feelings are different, they want to be woman all the time and most want to change body parts, their need is constant and demanding and stronger then any other feeling.

This to me seems like an enormous difference. Not however to uninformed people or perhaps to anyone looking for a justification for their feelings.

I don't believe any gender variant person would blame nurture rather then nature, in justifying their feelings. In truth it might be parts of both. If however you have guilt feelings or an insatiable need to know it's easier to go with Nature. And in going with nature comes the combining of all gender variant people as the same, only to different degrees. I really feel it's not two sides of the same coin but two entirely different coins.

I encourage comments from anyone who feels part timers and full timers should be considered in the same category, or that they know the difference between the part time and full time gender variant person.

Lynda Frank

"I remember when I was first thinking of the very real possibility of my going through a 'gasp' sex change. This was in the days before tranny support groups. I steeled myself and made the long distance call to IFGE. To my delight, I spoke with a trans woman who calmed me down and pointed me in the direction of some deeper self-work prior to making my decision to proceed. It was invaluable advice. I owe a debt to IFGE. I think many trans folks do. Maybe one of them is you? If not right this minute, then perhaps some day?

Look, IFGE is an organization that seems to rise above all politics of the trans experience, getting to the heart of what matters to each of its multi-identified members. Wouldn't it be worth the mini-investment of a membership to make sure IFGE is there for all of us? I think so."

IFGE Membership

is belonging, is working for the good of everyone, and is your opportunity to assist others in finding help.

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The Necessity of Sex Reassignment Surgery

by Miqqi Alicia Gilbert, PhD

The following article appeared as an Op-Ed piece in The Ottawa Citizen *on May 22nd 2008. It helps to know that in 1998 the then Conservative Provincial government in Ontario removed SRS from the government health plan, OHIP.*

The great majority of us tend to think of sex and gender as something quite settled and immutable. There are males and females, women and men, and you are born one or the other and that's an end of it. We think this because most of us have no problem living in our birth-designated sex, and from the moment the nurse declares, "It's a girl!" or, "It's a boy!" everything seems to follow quite naturally. What we don't realize is that we are the lucky ones. We do not have to struggle to pretend to be a gender that that does not fit, that feels unnatural and artificial. We are not mired in despair at not having a body that matches our mind. We are fortunate. We are not transsexual.

Choosing one group to attack because you do not like or understand them is bigotry.

Ten years ago the Conservative government of Ontario removed SRS from OHIP. SRS is sex reassignment surgery, and it involves reconstructing an individual's genitals from a penis to a vagina, or the creation of a penis where a vagina was. In addition to other therapies such as hormone treatment and electrolysis, it is part of the process transsexuals undergo in order to become the person they know themselves to be. Failure to do so means, for these persons, a life of pain and despair. Recently Ontario Health Minister George Smitherman announced that Ontario would once again cover SRS for that small group that is eligible.

In response, Nepean-Carleton MP Pierre Poilievre has declared that the Federal government should hold back any health fund transfers used for this purpose. One reason that Mr. Poilievre's reaction is strange is that most provinces, including Alberta, already cover SRS, yet he has heretofore said nothing. So, unless this is a blatantly political move designed to embarrass the McGinty government, we can only assume that Mr. Poilievre is also going after Alberta and all the other provinces to demand a refund of the money spent on SRS for the years since the Harper government was formed. I find that unlikely.

Mr. Poilievre's plan is both ill considered and discriminatory.

It is ill considered because it would likely cost more money to administer the pay back of federal funds for the comparatively miniscule amount spent on sex reassignment surgery than to accept it. (Mr. Smitherman sets the amount at roughly $200,000 out of a $40.2 billion OHIP budget, a percentage so small I can't figure it…) It's ill considered because the money that will be spent on the psychiatric care of those who suffer from gender dysphoria will end up costing more than the surgery.

The plan is discriminatory because it rests on the idea that if *I* don't understand something, then it's wrong. If it's not *my* custom, *my* viewpoint, *my* tribal practice, then it doesn't make sense. Mr. Poilievre's plan is discriminatory because he is arbitrarily selecting a small defenceless group and attacking them without understanding their situation or issues. Every province views gender dysphoria as a serious and legitimate psychological malady, as does the DSM, The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association, the book that lists and describes all mental illnesses. Choosing one group to attack because you do not like or understand them is bigotry.

The thinking behind Mr. Poilievre's view is the same kind of thinking that called PTSD, post traumatic stress disorder, cowardice. When we did not understand the inner workings of the human mind as much as we do now, it was thought that a soldier who could not go on or who exhibited signs of abnormal behaviour was shirking or malingering. Indeed, during World War II, soldiers suffering from PTSD were executed for cowardice, and recent governmental apologies do little to assuage the pain and humiliation suffered by those men and their families. We understand better now that the mind is complex, subtle, and magnificent, and that any number of maladies that were thought to be dis-

missed, or cured by pulling up your socks, are real, and their sufferers in acute anguish and pain.

Mr. Poilievre has said that SRS is "unnecessary surgery." Does he believe that those who need it are faking their distress? Does he believe that these people could live happy and productive lives without the surgery? Well, let me tell you a secret: No one who has been psychiatrically approved, and wants sex reassignment surgery does not desperately need it. No one goes through the years of jumping through hoops, of dealing with family, friends, employers, and society at large on a whim. You have to want it so bad that if you do not get it, you may well end your life. And that, Mr. Poilievre, is what it is really all about.

It is easy to think of gender as something that is black or white, on or off, boy or girl. The truth is that it is not really like that at all. The best model for gender is not nearly so simple. I like to think of sex and gender as similar to eyesight. Some people are right at 20/20 vision, but a great many of us are not. We need glasses or contacts or surgery to see in an average way. Other people are at the extremes, and may be blind or be able to see a dot at 25 meters.

Think of it this way: most of us get along being the gender we were told we are, but many of us still have some difficulties. Maybe you don't think you're masculine or feminine enough; maybe you're a guy who's too emotional; maybe a woman who disdains lace and is totally into sports and auto mechanics. You might suffer a bit here and there, but, more or less, there's room for you.

Now consider the extremes: at one end you may have Rambo and Barbie, but at the other you have transsexuals whose internal sense of identity is completely at odds with their bodies. Imagine what that must be like. Imagine that you are what you are – a man or a woman, and like most of the world, you're all right with that. Imagine that everyone – you family, your friends, Mr. Poilievre, and the whole world is saying you are not what you believe yourself to be, but just the opposite. You're not a man, but a woman; not a woman, but a man. That's being a transsexual.

There's more. If you are living as a member of the opposite sex, but have not had SRS, how do you get a passport that has a sex designation that looks like you? You look like a man, and you feel like a man, but down below you've got an innie and not an outie. Can you change your birth certificate? Can you get a passport? If you were born male but have been living as a woman for ten years, have breasts, no facial hair, and move about the world as a woman, what happens in bathrooms? When you show your passport and the designation is 'M' will you be strip-searched? Will you be publicly humiliated? Probably. And why do I think that Mr. Poilievre would be the first one to insist that no one can change their papers without SRS?

Sex reassignment surgery provides relief for the small number of people in our society who are incredibly distressed by the mismatch between their personality, psyche, and genitals. Our culture is highly genital-based, and suspicion that someone's gender presentation does not match their genitals puts that person in both psychological and physical danger. Failure to support those in need is every bit as callous as failing to support any other fellow citizen with a pressing medical issue.

I enjoy hearing from you. Please write me at Miqqi@-X-ifge.org, but remove the –X-.

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Go Ask Alice

What Crossdressers Want to Know Part 2: Am I Gay?

by Alice Novic, M.D.

Welcome back to my series on the most common questions I hear from crossdressers. Now keep in mind, folks, that though I am one of the few known psychiatrist/crossdressers, I am Alice Novic, after all, and I'm not always going to give you the answers you expect to hear—or want to hear, or what your wife wants to hear, or what your brave transsexual friend wants to hear, n'est-ce pas? What I will offer you is compassion and my best attempt at accuracy.

Today's question is Am I gay? The short answer is No, you're not, but you're not exactly straight either.

To me, and to most gay men, being gay describes a specific thing. It's more like saying "He's Mexican," rather than "He's definitely not from around here." As a crossdresser, you're clearly not gay in the sense of wanting to be a man sexually with a man and all the stuff that so often comes with it, like a head-spinning appreciation for the male form, an Oscar-Wilde-like wit, and a passion for fashion and celebrities. Oh, sure you may be loving all the little nuances of ladies' clothing, but that's not the same thing. Just the simple fact you call yourself a crossdresser means that you're not gay, for most people (and specifically me in part one of this series) define crossdresser as a primarily straight man who finds satisfaction in imagining he is a woman. So, you're fundamentally heterosexual on some level or sorely misusing the term.

Most of you, no doubt, are started-out-straight MTF transpeople and that, in my view at least, is an intersex condition that defines our gender identity and broadens the range of our sexuality.

But, are you completely straight? Well, hey, to answer that question I first owe you a definition of the term straight. Completely straight, or completely heterosexual describes a man who is only interested in sex as a man with a woman. You, my dear reader, may—despite your crossdressing, consider yourself such a fella, only for that to change—if you're lucky—as opportunities present themselves. What if you had the chance to make like lipstick lesbians with your wife, or with a beautiful transsexual or another cute crossdresser? Or what if you found yourself feeling sweet and sought after by some gentle giant of a man the next time you set foot on a dance floor?

I imagine a lot of hands going up out there—and a few liars, or more sympathetically I should say, people trying not to think too much. After all, there are enough bitter pills to swallow in everyday life, without having to take on the hypothetical ones. Nonetheless, folks, we all know that any number of these scenarios sound pretty sizzling and they may not be man-on-man gay, but they certainly ain't straight either, in the sense that non-TG men take no interest in these things. Believe me I know; I work with plenty.

The truth is that, if you're a crossdresser or even a transsexual reading this column, you may not be gay, but you're probably not wholly straight either. Or look at it this way: Though you may not be chocolate, you're not pure vanilla either. You're strawberry. Most of you, no doubt, are started-out-straight MTF transpeople and that, in my view at least, is an intersex condition that defines our gender identity and broadens the range of our sexuality.

I admit that that's an inconvenient truth and different from what you might hear from other authorities in our community. But I'm a psychiatrist, after all, not a salesperson, no matter how just our cause. I'm who you go to when the comforting illusions fall flat. I am strawberry, and I'm okay with it and hope the same for you, if you suspect that deep down you're a little fruity too.

Life's rich, complex, and full of possibilities. Be careful and enjoy!

To learn more about me than you'd ever dare ask, please see my smart, sexy memoir, **Alice in Genderland: A Crossdresser Comes of Age** *from the IFGE Bookstore, iUniverse or Amazon.com.*

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Ask a Voice Therapist

by Kathe S. Perez, MA, CCC-SLP
Certified Speech-Language Pathologist

How wonderful is the human voice.
It is indeed the organ of the soul.
The intellect of woman sits enthroned visibly on her forehead and in her eye,
And the heart of woman is written on her countenance, but
The soul reveals itself in the voice only.

— Henry W. Longfellow (1850s)
[Gender change mine]

That poem was given to me in my first year of clinical practice by an 86 year old man who was my patient. He'd been experiencing a weak, hoarse voice and said he found the poem in the library while doing research on something. He said that this poem perfectly expressed what he was experiencing—that his physical voice did not reveal his inner voice (the voice of his soul). He said he felt strong and vital and his physical voice was that of a weak old man and he didn't feel like a weak old man. He was still on the bench as a judge at 86!

In graduate school, I learned the anatomy, physiology and science of the human voice, but it wasn't until this judge came along that I actually considered the voice-soul connection. They didn't teach that in graduate school.

Voice feminization therapy is an emerging sub-discipline of speech pathology and a growing number of speech pathologists are providing this service.

I was minding my own speech-therapist's business, when the phone rang. It was a lady named, Joanne (not her real name). She said she was having a problem with her voice--which was quite evident, not only was she very hoarse, she did not sound like a Joanne-- and asked if I could help. As the conversation unfolded, I learned she was a transexual and had been living as Joanne for many years, but was not happy with her voice. Some time previously, she went to a physician who surgically altered the length of her vocal folds (or cords, but NOT chords). This surgery did increase her pitch, but she still did not sound like a woman and she was permanently hoarse as a result. Let me hasten to add at this point (maybe a topic for another newsletter) that I'm not commenting either way right now about the benefits and risks of phonosurgery. Over the course of her treatment, Joanne taught me many things about the transgender world. She improved her voice, but not greatly.

Now, it's been nine years and thousands of people later. Voice feminization therapy is an emerging sub-discipline of speech pathology and a growing number of speech pathologists are providing this service.

The purpose of this article is to provide you the reader with a forum for a question-answer exchange with a certified speech-language pathologist with 26 years of education and clinical experience caring for and training the human voice.

A very common question I'm asked is, "Can I really change my voice?" The simple answer is yes, but there are some very critical factors that will ultimately determine how your own feminine voice will sound. One hopefully obvious factor is practice. You can not get anything without working for it. If you don't practice you won't improve. Simply "trying to speak in a feminine voice" won't do it. You must PRACTICE-PRACTICE-PRACTICE.

Your general physical health will also affect the sound of your voice. The vocal folds reside in your body, so when you're not well they aren't. People who suffer from allergies, asthma, acid reflux (to name a few) might have trouble adjusting their pitch, vocalizing without tension, and breathing effectively. Emotional well being is another factor. Let's face it; transitioning can (and often is) difficult. When you're stressed many things happen—some include holding your breath, tightening your jaw, throat and shoulders—muscle tension affects the voice. Sleep, hydration, what we ingest, how much we talk (or don't talk) all affect your voice. Most voice therapists provide a vocal hygiene program for their patients and I've adapted this and call it "Top Ten Tips for the Transgender Voice." You can see on <*www.exceptionalvoice.com*>.

Back to the question: "Can I really change my voice?" Let's saunter for a moment through the forest of laryngeal anatomy/physiology (the structure and function of the larynx; pronounced "lair-inks").

A recent and extraordinary article in Scientific American, The Human Instrument, by Ingo Titze (January 2008), expertly discusses anatomy and physiology of the voice and for the voice enthusiast it really is worth the read. The average length of the vocal folds in an adult female is 14 mm, which gives an average

pitch of 200-220 Hz (that's about A3 or the "A" below middle "C" on the piano). Don't become alarmed if none of this makes sense. I'll hold your hand as we walk through all of this. The average length of the vocal folds in an adult male is 20 mm; nearly 30% longer than the female vocal folds. This length results in a pitch at about A2 (the "A" an octave below the A3 on the piano) or 100-110 Hz. Not only is the length an issue, the thickness (or mass) of the vocal folds also determines pitch. In brief, male vocal folds are longer and thicker and female vocal folds are shorter and thinner. This length and mass of the vocal folds roughly correlates with physical size. Large men (height and girth) have lower pitched voices. Small women have higher pitched voices.

How do we make the adjustment so the pitch gets higher? There's a wee little muscle on the side of the larynx (actually all the laryngeal muscles are wee little) called the cricothyroid muscle (referred to from now on as the CT muscle) and when it contracts the vocal folds lengthen. As the vocal folds lengthen they thin. Thinner vocal folds will create a higher pitch.

But, "Can I really change my voice?" Yes, begin with your pitch. Slide your voice higher on certain sounds like "ha" or "hoo". Listen to your voice. Are you higher in pitch? Say simple words and phrases in a higher voice. Find a method that will work for you. Our audio CDs and coaching work! Stick to it. Don't give up. It takes time to make these changes.

I have come to love and respect your beautiful walk into my gender. I love being a woman! And I love witnessing, experiencing and hearing your emergence as one.

Send me your questions. Ask me! Let me know what's on your mind. See you next issue.

Kathe Perez is a nationally recagnized expert in the care and training of the human voice. She is the faunder and president of Exceptional Voice, Inc., a campany which provides a unique line of speech and vaice training pragrams for prafessianal and business peaple wha demand exceptional communication skills af themselves. As a certified Speech-Language Pathalagist, Kathe has been working in the field far 22 years. She has been praviding voice feminizatian therapy far the TG community for years. You can reach Kathe by telephone at 1-866-4-MY-VOICE, by email at kathe@exceptianalvaic.com and via her website at www.exceptianalvaice.com .

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Dr. Bowers strives to stay connected with the community at conferences and events nationwide:

- Trans-Health Conference (May 08)
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- California Dreamin' – San Jose, CA (Apr 08)
- Southern Comfort – Atlanta, GA (Sept 08)

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Address to the New England Transgender Pride March and Rally

by Monica Roberts

I am deeply honored to be standing before you as we make history together with today's New England Transgender Pride March and Rally. I sincerely thank the organizing committee for extending me the invitation and opportunity to address you today.

W.E.B. DuBois, a distinguished son of Massachusetts who was an NAACP founder, once stated, "We cannot stand still; we cannot permit ourselves simply to be victims."

When he spoke these words a little over a century ago, they were directed at my fellow African-Americans. But these words are just as applicable to my fellow transgender people of all colors as well.

We cannot sit still as our inclusion in civil rights law, despite clear and pressing evidence that we desperately need it, is not only treated as an afterthought by some legislators, we're cut out of proposed bills and tossed aside like empty soda cans.

> First class citizenship means that our rights are codified, respected and protected at all levels of government, be it city, county, state or federal level.

We cannot sit still as the Forces of Intolerance, right-wing pundits and so-called fundamentalist 'christians' use myths, distortions and outright lies to demonize and dehumanize us as they pitifully attempt to sway public opinion against doing the morally proper and correct thing by recognizing our humanity.

We cannot sit still as hate crimes committed against us are ignored, the perpetrators are given a legal slap on the wrist and segments of our society give their wink and a nod of approval.

We cannot sit still as the media disrespects the unfortunate victims of these crimes. Their old names are weaved throughout slanted and sensationalized stories as their new names and identities are disrespectfully placed in quotation marks.

We cannot sit still as an organization with an equal sign logo that claims to be our ally spends a decade fighting our inclusion in the Employment Non Discrimination Act. Its executive director adds insult to injury by walking into our signature convention in Atlanta, promising to fight for an inclusive ENDA while collecting $20,000 of our hard earned money, then reneges on the promise weeks later. He later claims he 'misspoke' while they demonize their critics by claiming they're concocting 'transgender conspiracy theories.'

We cannot sit still as fundamentalists, conservative talk show hosts, radio personalities and pundits attack our patriotism, our lives, our values, our right to exist, and our constitutional rights for ratings points or to scapegoat us for the failures of their dry as dust mean spirited ideology.

We cannot sit still as people frustrated with their own lives use us as focal points for their anger, attack our community for the purposes of organizing their own, use us as bogeymen for fundraising purposes or as a distraction so people won't pay attention to their catastrophic failures of leadership.

It's time to stop wandering in the desert of shame and guilt. It's time for us to cast aside the woe is me victim-hood about being transgender Americans and boldly stride forward towards the oasis of freedom, equality, justice and pride in who we are as transgender men and women.

Our pioneering predecessors passed a torch to us. As their successors, it's up to us to keep it lit, hold it high and not allow anyone to douse the freedom flame until we can pass that torch on to the next generation of transpeople.

Nelson Mandela said a decade ago that to be free is not merely to

cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the lives of others. Once we cast off the chains of self-doubt, shame, and self-hatred, the first people we owe respect to are ourselves.

So how do we do that? We show respect for ourselves by standing up and fighting for our rights and our basic humanity like my African-American GLBT brothers and sisters did at Philadelphia's Dewey's Lunch counter in 1965.

We show respect for ourselves by standing up and fighting like our brothers and sisters did at San Francisco's Compton's Cafeteria in 1967.

We show respect for ourselves like Miss Major, the late Sylvia Rivera and our brothers and sisters did almost 40 years ago this month at Stonewall in 1969.

We show respect for ourselves when we stand up and loudly proclaim in one voice that we will no longer meekly accept or tolerate second-class treatment or second class citizenship. We are putting friends, foes and 'frenemies' on notice that we are demanding an upgrade to first class citizenship.

First class citizenship means that our rights are codified, respected and protected at all levels of government, be it city, county, state or federal level. We're also putting you on notice that from this day forward, if we ain't in a proposed civil rights law, we reserve the right as a community to kill a non-inclusive bill until it does.

We must act for not only the transkids that Barbara Walters profiled on 20/20 and others yet unborn, but for our fallen brothers and sisters such as Deborah Forte, Chanelle and Gabrielle Pickett, Rita Hester, Tyra Hunter, Gwen Araujo, Brandon Teena and F.C. Martinez. We must act for every transperson who fought, marched, organized, lobbied, lived a stealth life, raised hell and died so that our lives could be a little bit better than theirs.

We took action towards earning that first class citizenship upgrade by marching in Northampton's streets today. We let our feet do the walking, but from now on our lips, our pens and pencils, our e-mails, our faxes, our letters, our telephone calls and our votes in this and future elections must do the talking.

Never again must we allow ourselves to sit still and allow ourselves to be victimized by friend or foe. It's past time for us to say it loud, "I'm Transgender and Proud," and take our rightful place at the American family table.

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A Second First Period

by Arden Eli Hill

Take my vial of testosterone and divide the amount it costcost by the number of months it covers, then compare it to the amount of money I would need to spend on tampons, pads, pain killers, chocolate bars, and other menstruation-related products and you'd probably find that it costs less to avoid my period with testosterone than to menstruate. Still, when I decided to go off of hormones after approximately two and a half years on testosterone, there were other costs to measure, like thinning hair and the genderqueer aspect of my transgender identity. My decision to stop this aspect of my transition does not mean I'm going back to being a girl, though it does mean that at some point in the near future I'm going to have a second first period. I'm worried about this and attempt to comfort myself with the knowledge that at least this time around
I know what to expect.

I got my period in seventh grade, specifically, while serving as co-ringmaster for the middle school circus at my catholic school. I was wearing a top hat, white jodhpurs, and possibly a large black mustache. No one knew, not even me, as the blood did not seep through my clothes. When I went to the bathroom after the show and saw a thick brown substance in my underwear, I thought I'd shit my pants. Having recently spent time visiting my grandmother in the nursing home might have contributed to this fear, though I maintain that "blood" does not even begin to describe an actual period. I'd skinned my knee before. I knew blood. Blood was red and viscous. The substance in my underwear was not. When I got up the courage to take a close look at it, sometime after I figured out which mysterious hole the substance was coming from, I discovered it was purple.

"Your period is not just blood like from a cut," I told my sister when she was eleven. "It's tissue too and it looks like a cross between bloody snot and a steak sauce smoothie." She probably didn't believe me, but I hope that when her first period struck she was spared, at least, the shame of believing she'd gone incontinent. Even when the menstruating person knows what is happening she (or he!) still has to deal with other people's ignorance. My ex-boyfriend and I tried unsuccessfully to convince his younger brother that the girl he'd hooked up with was not "poopy."

"She said she was having her period," he told us, "But that shit didn't look like blood."

"Do you know if she was wearing a pad?" we asked.

"Oh gross, no, I don't know," he said. "She took her underwear off herself."

"Dude," we say, "She wasn't lying to you. She didn't shit herself. She was having her period."

My ex-boyfriend and I did consider ourselves experts, to some degree, in menstruation, seeing as how we were both trans guys and had bled for years.

Even folks who know that a period is a period can be weird when "Aunt Flo" is visiting. I've had several lovers not want to touch me while I was having my period. Of those, some did not want to be touched, believing that menstruation was icky across the board. A small percentage of lovers had no problem with being touched while they were having their periods. Only my period, it seems, was problematic. One lover, and I'll sing her praises forever for this despite the fact that we no longer speak to each other, found my period a turn on. "You're so wet," she'd pant into my ear, moistening my earlobe and tragus with her breath.

I'm pretty neutral about periods. Fucking someone on their period isn't all that different for me than fucking someone who is not. In both cases I'm wearing gloves, so my half of clean up is just pulling off the gloves so that the wet side, as usual, is on the inside of the latex, and at most being a little more careful where I dispose of the gloves. Not for biohazard reasons, but so as not to tempt the dog to go foraging in the trashcan. I'm also unperturbed by masturbating while on the rag. Aunt Flo is close kin to Rosy Palm and her five sisters.

I had one period after starting testosterone, but it was much milder than the ones before. On the last day of it, my underwear was like a shroud for something dead that was finally admitting to being killed. I was glad to see it go, not that I ever felt like it

I am a terrible menstruator. While extremely fastidious about changing my tampon during the day to avoid toxic shock syndrome, by night I am a bleeding fool. My strategy is to sleep naked on top of a towel. "Disgusting" an ex of mine called it.

was a trigger for my gender issues, but rather just a run-of-the-mill pain. Of course I had my period when I went on the only cruise ship I've ever been on, on the longest campout, and when I made my début in a tiara, kid gloves, and a long white dress. I did a terrible job of keeping track of my cycle, but on the day of my wedding I was not at all surprised to pull down my white Armani pants and see a spot of blood.

I'd rather not get my period, but I comfort myself with the following truth: I'll likely get a nine month break at some point, as I'm interested in starting a family by giving birth as well as adopting. Even when my period comes back, my third first period, at least I'm not going to die with the bloody bitch. Eventually, menopause will stop my cycle and the drop in estrogen will bring my body's testosterone level to heights they'd never know without medical intervention.

My last shot, 200 milligrams of testosterone in a sesame oil suspension, was three weeks ago. I'm approximately one week late for a shot. Perhaps my body thinks that I'm just low on syringes or am having difficulty finding someone to give me the injection. This has happened before and I've gotten cramps, but I've always been able to rectify the situation before the red tide turned. When pain comes this time, it will be the precursor to more pain. My body will become a blood clock, measuring the months with more regularity than I've been able to keep track of by circling shot days in my day planner or shaving the back of my neck.

Within the month, most likely, I will circle a number in my day planner in bright red. I'm not going to "manstrate," though I do get a kick out of this term and support the people who choose to use it and other altered words such as "mangina" and "cockpit." If I do give birth at some point, and my bipolar meds allow, I would happily chest feed my baby. I've recently become an uncle for the second time. My sister gave birth to a happy baby. "It's a girl, so far," I've taken to telling friends. When I was born I was swaddled in a pink blanket. When I imagine this now I see my small body wrapped in stained sheets, the blood making the white appear pink.

I know that I should prepare for my upcoming period, buy supplies or at least tear some old tee-shirts into rags, but I've never been very good at the whole process. A friend of mine in college compared pads to sheep. Tampons didn't seem all that dissimilar. I suppose I'd rather walk around sitting on a bloody sheep than being fucked by one. This might change now, seeing as I no longer own any girl underwear and boxer shorts don't provide the necessary area for a pad's adhesive strip. I'll never get the hang of non-applicator tampons though. Every time I've tried to put one of those nightmares in, it has gone sideways and I've felt like a vaginaly impaired failure, and a slut no less. The lover who loved my period could be convinced to put non-applicator tampons in for me, allowing us to share a small special moment and leave less of a plastic footprint on the planet. Goodbye environment, I'm single now. Despite the fact that my firefighter housemate responds to medical emergencies, I don't think she'll be stopping the flow of my blood anytime soon, even if I promise to take the tampon out myself.

I am a terrible menstruator. While extremely fastidious about changing my tampon during the day to avoid toxic shock syndrome, by night I am a bleeding fool. My strategy is to sleep naked on top of a towel. "Disgusting" an ex of mine called it. This was one of the ex's who for the longest time wouldn't touch me while I was on my period, but would happily spread her blood splotched thighs as if she were doing me a favor by letting me give her cramp relieving orgasms. Eventually I found out that there was a legitimate term for my unconventional monthly practice, free bleeding. I've read all about it on the Internet. Perhaps I should do more research, in case anything has changed in the world of menstruation since I've been away. Maybe I'll troll Craig's list looking for fetishists

now that I am going to become, as the poet Rae Thomas puts it, "a beautiful boy who bleeds."

I have been a bleeding boy before. Although I medically transitioned from someone who read as female to someone who reads as male, I maintained my solidarity with noho (no hormone) trans guys who either were unable to take testosterone or unwilling. I'm one of the few guys I know that does not have a T-Birthday. I know just from the context of starting Testosterone on a Christmas visit with a then lover's family, that I started hormones in December of 2005. I know the exact date of when I quit cutting and drinking. I remember far too many of my ex's birthdays. I do not know when I got my first shot, though I do remember the friend who gave it to me. Unless I act fast and backtrack through my day planner to find the day of my last shot and write it down, I will not know when I became poho (post-hormone). Friends get a kick out of my new label, teasing that I was a po' ho long before transition.

Over the course of beginning this essay and coming to a conclusion, another three weeks have gone by. No period yet, but there have been scares where I've felt the estrogen-induced wetness of my cunt and done the finger check. Nothing. I have bled though. I've had several nosebleeds, a combination of aggressive rugby practices and shifting weather. As someone who has struggled not to work out my emotions by cutting for the past two years, I'm comforted by the sight of blood I need not feel guilty for shedding. Even if I pick my nose, a nosebleed isn't as much my fault as running a razor across my upper thighs.

I don't delude myself and think that, post Testosterone, I'm in for a monthly dose of comfort. At best, my period will be something I don't notice all that often. I still imagine worst case scenarios for starting. I'm pretty sure I won't be dressed as a ringmaster but dropping a clot while I'm wearing nothing but a collar on a date with the guy I have a crush on would be suitably mortifying, especially as now I have less of a mustache to hide behind. I worry about my period outing me in the form of blood droplets on the back of my jeans. Would anal bleeding be a suitable excuse? Would I be relieved to be believed if I used it? Maybe, if I claimed the blood was due to copious amounts of rough butt sex. With the exception of cramps, I don't see menstruation as being much of a hamper to my sex life. I don't feel like any less of a guy when that time of the month rolls around, though I may feel less like fisting. It's muscle soreness, not emotional baggage. I feel like a guy when I'm receiving sex, giving sex, sanding a deck, or being dressed up in flowers and pixie wings by the little girl I babysit. I feel like a female guy and soon my body will manifest that identity in a way that it hasn't manifested itself in years. This time, with two puberties under my belt, I might just have matured enough to keep track of when I can expect to bleed.

Arden Eli Hill is currently o poetry editor far Breoth ond Shadow, an online journal af disobility culture and literature. In 2008, he was o poetry fellaw ot the Lombdo Literory Retreot far Emerging Writers. Arden's work hos been occepted or published by Sein und Werden, Wordgothering, Willaw Springs, Ghoti Mogazine, Cancrete, The Hallins Critic, The 2008 Windy City Times Pride Literory Supplement, the 2007 ond 2008 Inglis Hause Poetry Chopbook, Breoth and Shodaw, Collective Fallaut, Best Gay Erotico 2008, Bays in Heat, laveyaudivine.com, the Lambda Literary oword winning onthalogy First Persan Queer ond its sequel Secand Persan Queer.

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R E X MAGNIFICUS

AMATEUR THEATRICALS

by Ms. Bob Davis

Since professional male impersonators were mainstays of both vaudeville and English music halls, it's no wonder amateur theatre featured "trousers roles" as well. Some of the photos in the little grouping are probably from actual shows. But others show off-stage moments of gender play, a lighthearted joke for a small audience. No one could accuse Emma Bouser and Ethel Overheim of not being lighthearted with their over-sized men's clothes, pigeon toes and knock-knees. They're not impersonating, they're just funnin'.

The photo probably isn't from a theatrical production; more like a day at the fair. Maybe Emma and Ethel grabbed their escorts' duds and mugged for the camera before laughing their way down the midway. They're standing in front of a professional photography backdrop, but this could as easily have been shot at a booth as a studio. Though the photo appears to be old, it's not dated. One clue might be that Parker's Landing, PA, where the photo was taken, ceased to exist on March 1, 1873 when it was merged with Lawrenceburg into Parker, PA.

The photo of three boys and three girls in profile is from a number called, "Six of One, Half a Dozen of the Other," from Fancy Dress Dance, March 1, 1917. I imagine it was a song and dance. The handwriting on the reverse identifies the performers as, left to right, Dot Short, Doris Bench, Dorothy Roberts, Dorothy Blackmore, Lal Owen and Mona Williams. So all the performers are girls, but there's no attempt at male impersonation. All the dancers are dressed the same in bi-gendered costume, boy's sailor suit on the right and girl's pinafore on the left. The name of the photographer is H. H. Davies & Sons from Aberystwyth, which is on the west coast of Wales.

There's a classic androgyny in the duo with their cigarettes, top hats and tuxedos (*left*). This, too, may not be from any kind of a show. It could be a masquerade or just a night on the town.

I believe I bought this photo at a bookstore in either Amsterdam or Munich in 1981. I can still smell the musty air of the shop, but can't tell if it's German must or Dutch must.

There's no information about the swashbuckling thespian with the cape and plumed hat (*right*). I imagine it's a backstage shot from a school show. The background could be a schoolroom, but it could be a lot of other things, too.

The person in the close-up is definitely made-up for the stage, wearing a fake moustache, beard and wig. Her eyebrows are heavily waxed, powdered down and new brows, with a comical arch, are drawn above them. Her white shirt with lace at the throat demands a men's jacket to complete the costume.

This is also the most serious attempt at male impersonation and it fails at this range. But under the glare of stage lights an audience could be fooled, especially if the actor has a masculine bearing and self-assured delivery.

Of all the photos this is the only one that might be from a semi-professional, perhaps college, production.

And, if you simulate the audience's artistic distance and by looking at the photo from 10 or 12 feet away, it seems like the impersonation might have been theatrically successful.

LANNIE!

MY JOURNEY FROM MAN TO WOMAN

by Lannie Rose
author of
How To Change Your Sex
A Lighthearted Look at the Hardest Thing You'll Ever Do

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Out with Miss Vera

by Veronica Vera

Within NYC there are a lot of transgender options to be out and about. You could drop into the apartment of Crossdressers International on a Wednesday night and connect with those ladies; most of whom dress like well-kept wives or career women (with the exception of Miss Pettie Pie in her crinolines and gingham). You can be a diva, a drag queen, or a deb in denim. You can go FTM too, though we're not talking about female to male quite so much in this column because, as dean of **Miss Vera's Finishing School for Boys Who Want to Be Girls**, FTM is not my focus. But whoever you are in you deepest being, you have the freedom to explore and find your balance. I encourage you to do so.

What Makes An Icon?

Cher, Diana Ross, Tina Turner, Judy Garland . . .

Besides their fame and popularity as world-famous performers, what these women share is their status as drag icons. Here in NYC for almost 20 years, another performer has been celebrated with an event devoted totally to her in her many different personae. That's what Night of 1000 Stevies is all about. Using the a title as a tongue-in-cheek homage to the big drag ball, Night of 1000 Gowns, downtown impresario Chi Chi Valenti and her musical mate DJ Johnny Dynell (*http://www.mothernyc.com*) created NOTS with the idea that everyone would come as their favorite (or most easily put together) version of Stevie Nicks: Stevie as the Night Bird, the flower child, Stevie in leather, Stevie in Lace. I sent the two intrepid reporters Misty Madison and Michelle Xavier to cover the event for TG Tapestry. About 800 revelers attended the party that was held at NYC's new Highline Ballroom. Some people went all out in their Stevie wear, others just used some strategically placed baby's breath, like the man who attached it to his beard. The Stevie crowd is a mix of downtown party people who put a lot of emphasis on creativity and fashion . . . or they get pretty naked. So you can go with a little effort or a lot. The important thing is just to have a great time. Misty asked Chi Chi if Stevie Nicks herself had ever attended Night of 1000 Stevies. She said "We believe that Stevie came incognito as just another Stevie in 2000." The clue being that Stevie's escort was recognized as the bodyguard at the real Stevie's show in Las Vegas. I tend to believe curiosity got the better of Stevie and she actually did attend . . . I mean how could she resist!

Photo by Mr. Wilson

Rules of Engagement

My student Bob / Brittany (not the real name) sur-

prised me when, after dating a woman for a number of months, he recently announced that he had asked her to marry him. His fiancée knew that Bob was transgender and on a hormone regimen, so that was a definite plus. Bob had told her that she had to be interviewed by me and he said it only half joking. So I decided to help this couple by using the information I already knew from my work as Bob's teacher to devise a questionnaire for them to discuss and answer together. Some of the questions had to do with finances, because we all know that couples can split up over money. But the focus of my interest was not on the financial aspects of their relationship, but on intimacy issues. My questions were based on what I already knew about Bob / Brittany's herstory, so they may not be the right fit for everyone, but you will get the idea. Here are some of the remarks from the section on sexual compatibility.

"The word 'compatible' is key here. This is an area where you make your own rules as long as it works for the two of you. 1) Do you anticipate that you will sleep together every night? Or some nights? 2) Would you like your own bedroom? 3) What aspects of your sex life are most important to you: holding and cuddling? The physical acts . . . penetration, oral sex . . . ? 3) Will Bob's hormone therapy continue? 4) Will Bob / Brittany's transgender issues continue to be explored? Will your sexual relationship be monogamous or open in some way, and if open, how?"

Within moments after I'd emailed these and the other parts of the questionnaire to my student, he and his fiancée were sharing their responses and getting to know each other even better, with some surprising results. What I love about my life at Miss Vera's academy is that it is always so full of possibilities. It was exciting to create a new kind of "pre-nup" for this happy couple. I wish them the very best life has to offer. Oops, I forgo one important question: Will it be a double gown ceremony?

Doctors Orders

The mind of Kate Bornstein is a modern miracle, but her body is human and vulnerable so like most of us, she can sometimes wind up in the hospital. While flat on her back, she rose to the occasion and composed an illustrated pamphlet for the hospital staff that she titled, "*The Care & Feeding Of Your New Tranny Patient: An easy-to-follow guide to the care and management of that strange (cute) patient in the single room down the hall.*" Kate's pamphlet was written with the desire to help the medical staff understand the special needs of a tranny patient while reminding them of their responsibilities to her as just another human being in need of their best professional care. She wrote, "Transsexuals are people . . . just like you! Okay, maybe not just like you. We're a friendly sort of people for the most part, just like you. We have friends and family who love us, and we love them right back. From time to time, we get sick and we count on help from folks like you, in order to get well again. Sometimes it's really hard to tell if we're a man or a woman. The very best way to find out is to ask us what pronoun we like to use." Kate requested that "single room" right off the bat in order to make her stay more smooth, and the hospital staff obliged. She also included some reminders of her needs regarding medical equipment specific to her transgender body. I'm sure a quick note to Kate could get

TOP TO BOTTOM: Joey Arias with actress Marisa Tamei and Basil Twist, following performance of "Arias with a Twist" / Paige Stevenson, Jae Birdsong and Basil Twist / Kate Bornstein's cover page to The Core & Feeding Of Your New Tronny Patient / Jessica Rabbit aka HEATHER with her dancer BRIDGET and Theo Kagan (Photo by Nancy Isla) / Johnny Dynell and DJ Sammy Ja

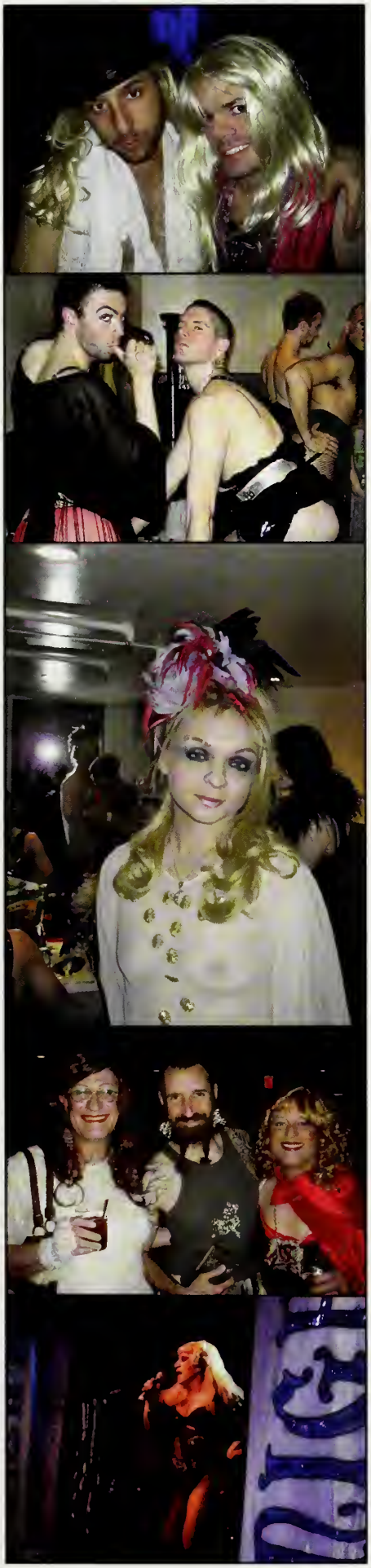
you a copy of this handy brochure, which you could then personalize to your situation. (*www.kate-bornstein.com*). Happily, Ms. Bornstein, who I'm honored to say is our academy's dean of hearts, made it out of the hospital safe and sound, and made it easier for the next tranny patient. What a role model!

Diva Makes Dollars

We were bowled over by Arias with a Twist, a psychedelic dream of a show concocted by drag diva Joey Arias and puppet master Basil Twist. *The New York Times* was also wowed and gave Joey and Basil a huge rave review with gigantic photos. Years ago, when I first heard Joey Arias channel the voice of Billie Holiday, I knew he was onto something great. He went on to star for six years in the Las Vegas show Zoomanity produced by Cirque du Soleil. The first time I saw Basil Twist's mesmerizing puppetry, it was a highlight of drag queen Sherry Vine's production of Charlie's Angels. I vowed I wanted to see more of this talented artist. Arias with a Twist went from a six week engagement to one of six months, making profits for the Here performance space and great news for all of the artists that it can support (*www.Here.org*). Hopefully the show will be remounted and if so, run to see it . . . even in your heels. (*www.BasilTwist.com*). The night we were there Marisa Tomei congratulated Twist and Arias and I caught the snap.

The Un-Conventional

To make a living in this high-priced town you have to be versatile. Girl about town Michelle Xavier meets the double challenge of being transgender and an actor by taking an assortment of jobs. You may have seen her dead or alive on Law & Order. One gig took her to the 15th annual LGBT convention at the Javits Convention Center. She invited me to check out the show and introduced me to its organizers from RDP group (*www.rdpgroup.com*). There were plenty of big business groups, banks and travel agencies offering their wares for LGBT dollars. Gay and lesbian run organizations and businesses outnumbered trans groups by far but I expect that more trans oriented groups will participate each year to come. Among the ladies staffing the table for Renaissance Transgender Association (*www.ren.org*) was my dear friend Melissa Vee and sister from her local chapter. Good luck to Melissa as she moves to a new town with new adventures, spreading gender euphoria.



TOP TO BOTTOM: John Polly (right) and friend / The Pixie Harlots / Julie Atlas Muz / Michelle Xavier (l) Misty Madison (r), and friend (c) / Joey Arias performing

Clover, Honey, Fruit & Park

"Strike A Pose," an art show that "celebrated the diversity of gender expression" curated by activist and entertainer Lady Clover Honey (*www.ladycloverhoney.com*) and sponsored by the Fresh Fruit Festival and Crossdressers International brought out the crowds. Viewers and well-wishers included those from all aspects of the trans community. Some of its busiest organizers took time off to socialize and share some culture as well as history. Pauline Park co-founder of NYAGRA (New York Association for Gender Rights Advocacy *www.nyagra.com*) told me that among its many goals, the organization is working hard to protect the rights of trans students who are abused and bullied at school. A documentary by Larry Tung about Pauline's life and work, thus far, enti-

tled "Envisioning Justice: The Journey of A Transgendered Woman" premiered at Newfest 2008, New York's LGBT film festival. In 2005, Ms. Park (*www.paulinepark.com*) was the first openly transgendered individual chosen to be a grand marshal the NYC Pride March. She continues to marshal forces for good.

Gowns Galore

I could write a novel about the Night of 1000 Gowns, the annual drag charity produced by the Imperial Court of New York, whose motto is "Do Good and Look Fabulous." For the last bunch of years it's been held in the grand ballroom of the Marriot Marquis Hotel at 46th and Broadway. Just as in the courts of old, there is always enough behind the scenes intrigue—before, during and after the event to keep wags gossiping for years, or at least until the following year when the excitement starts all over again. This year thanks to my good friend photographer Eric Kroll (*www.fetish-usa.com*) and student Clair Martin I can show you the event through some marvelous pictures. You'll see our academy table with attendant students, some more of the hundreds of guests and celebs in their elaborate costumes. What you can't see is some of the juicy events that accompanied the event weekend: the nervous balancing act of bringing my boyfriend Stu, aka Misty, as my date, while students looked on with envy; the brouhaha when entrepreneur Michael Salem's enthusiasm as a pr maven landed the event, himself and me in gossipy headlines in the NY Post's Page Six and consequently in hot water with the Courtiers. All of this and more led up to an evening that exploded in color, glamour, success for the charity and good will. Night of 1000 Gowns is a fairy tale come true. Gowns 2009 will take place on Saturday, March 21 and I urge you to attend. The pomp, pride and pageantry will sustain you for years to come. And you'll be contributing to a good cause. This year as in every year prior, the hard-working members of the court through NOATG raised tens of thousands of dollars for LGBT charities. To learn more about our academy table contact, me or contact the Imperial Court directly . . . then dust off your tiara and start putting together that outfit.

See You at IFGE

Well, that's it for another tiny taste of the Big Apple. You're invited to come visit our New York academy to continue your education and recreation in person. Or come see me at IFGE 2009 in Washington, D.C. this February!

Cherchez la femme,

Miss Vera
www.missvera.com
email: *webhostess@missvera.com*

Night of 1000 Gowns

Photography by Mariette Pathy Allen

Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand

by Mariette Pathy Allen

"NEVER BUY A RADIO FROM A MONK."

This is a local saying Tun, our Burmese travel guide, told us. There are two kinds of monks: those who spend their lives meditating, and those who meditate and teach. The teaching monks participate in the world. They listen to their radios, and apparently, love to tinker with them, making their functioning so complicated that by the time they're finished with their radios, nobody can figure out how to make them work.

"Us" includes my friend Katharine, currently defining herself as "an ex-pat from Paris." We decided to take a three week trip to Burma: Yangon, Bagan, Mandalay, and Lake Inle, and Northern Thailand: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, the Golden Triangle, and wind up in Bangkok. I thought I'd write a few comments on our trip, not as a narrative, but rather by mentioning a few things that struck me, and five fascinating women I met along the way.

From January 16 to February 7th, we traveled through countries where Buddhism dominates and blesses people's lives. Although, as I learned, Buddhism is considered a philosophy rather than a religion, its practice is responsible for almost all the art: the pagodas, temples, statues, and crafts. In Burma in par-

ticular, there are an astonishing number of structures honoring the Buddha. Whether decorated with gold leaf, or painted white, accented with mirrors or precious stones, new, renovated, or falling into decline, they're ravishing. The gigantic temples, or the flocks of pagodas shining in the sand, usually contain altars and enamel or mosaic depictions of the Buddha's life story, which seems in some ways similiar to Jesus.'

The chanting of monks and nuns abounds. Monasteries and nunneries play an enormous role in the education, spiritual and social lives of the Burmese. They offer an alternative to state schools, a safe haven for people in trouble, an opportunity for quiet and meditation, a rite of passage for young men, and a social hub for celebrating Buddhist festivals. Young people from isolated villages meet at these celebrations. We saw people of all ages joyfully huddled together in trucks or riding in oxcarts, journeying to a festival where they would stay for days, sleeping in makeshift shelters or in the monasteries.

We visited many markets and villages, sometimes traveling by rafts or long rowboats, sometimes by car. Almost every village offered extraordinary crafts varying from woven bags and scarves, jewelry, puppets, lacquer ware, paintings, and clothes, including "longhis": skirts worn by both men and women. I got into a buying frenzy: I loved so many of the items and the people selling them.

I was astonished to see water buffalo and ox teams in Burma. No tractors were evident although there were a number of motorcycles and old cars in the countryside. It felt as if we had slipped into an earlier time in history in a dreamily beautiful agrarian land with beautiful people who have little opportunity to change their lives.

Photography by Marielle Kelly Allen

Moe Moe

Moe Moe was one of the many young women selling necklaces at a pagoda in Mingun, a village across the lake from Mandalay. I had already bought two necklaces when she approached me.

"One more from me?" she asked.

I noticed Moe Moe's voice was lower than most women, not much, but enough for me to look at her again. To my surprise, I realized that I was speaking to a transwoman and asked Tun, our guide, if Moe Moe had a family in the village that we could visit.

Moe Moe's parents were attractive and kindly. Her mother didn't say much, but her father, an animated man who smiled a lot at first, started to cry when he saw that Moe Moe was crying. The tears came when I asked if she thought she would stay in the village for the rest of her life.

Moe Moe's mother had four older children and knew her youngest child was special by age four. Although most children in Burma only go to school from the ages of five to nine, Moe Moe didn't finish school because the teacher wouldn't allow her to sit with the girls and made her stand in the boys' line every day. Now, at nineteen, when Moe Moe goes to special events at the monastery, the monks allow her to sleep in the girls' area.

Her father knows sexual reassignment surgery is available in Thailand but also knows the family can't pay for it. Moe Moe said the only kinds of work "people like me" can do is in a beauty salon or in some kind of arts and crafts. The courses that might be available in Mandalay, an hour by boat, seem lifetimes away.

Interviews in Thailand

Gigi, a twenty-two year old hairstylist and make-up artist, lives in Chiang

Photography by Mariette Pathy Allen

Mai, in Northern Thailand. Lively and ambitious, Gigi wants to be among the "Top Ten" make-up artists in Thailand. She has lots of friends, most of whom are comfortable with her being a "Ladyboy."

Gigi felt like a girl since she was six. Her parents weren't happy at first but she was a "very good girl", so now they're ok about having another daughter. When she was eighteen she had her own beauty shop and was well known in the Lanna region where she grew up. Recently she's become politically active by starting an organization called "Ladyfake Lanna" (to distinguish it from "Ladyboy"!) The purpose of the organization is to support each other while working to improve the lives of ladyboys.

After watching performances of trained elephants, snakes, and crocodiles, Katharine and I were taken to a monkey show. Noeng, the show's peppy narrator. speaks very good English. She's twenty-six and has worked at this haven for monkeys for six years. Today she's not looking her best: she had a late night and didn't have time to shave this morning. Sometimes she comes to work in full make-up and a dress but she didn't seem at all uncomfortable being photographed in her androgynous state.

Noeng has no plans to change her body. Her parents don't approve of her crossdressing. Fellow employees however seem to like her very much and she enjoys dressing up and going out at night to dance and flirt.

When our Thai tour guide heard of my work, she introduced me to her friend, Kusala, a forty-seven year old award-winning tour guide from Chiang Rai. Kusala is fluent in English, Spanish, and Italian, and offers Thai cooking and dancing lessons to her groups.

Like Noeng, Kusala has done nothing to alter her body, yet nobody questions her womanhood. As she puts it: "It's what's inside that counts." She's the youngest of eight children and spent most of her childhood with her mother and sisters. Although she had to dress as a boy when going to University, she can't remember a time when she didn't feel like a girl. Kusala has had four longterm relationships with men. Eventually they leave her but always remain friends. Her strongest bond is with her mother. To compensate for being feminine and make herself acceptable to her mother, she excelled in everything she did whether it was gaining top honors at school or being an award-winning car racer.

One of the biggest tourist attractions in Bangkok is the Mambo Cabaret. It's the Radio City of drag!

Beautifully handsome young men and mostly beautiful ladyboys perform elaborate musical extravaganzas with graceful dancers, highly professional lighting, sets, and costumes. It is a spectacle of lip synch with an international flavor that includes tributes to the American Western, Chinese Opera, and Thai Folklore. The humor I was able to understand involved making fun of people who were caricatured as fat or ugly. As in most fairytales, ugly equals evil, and the beautiful are also virtuous, so it's fine to make fun of the ugly ones. I couldn't help think that to the Thais most of us tourists must look fat and ugly.

After the show, the performers paraded downstairs to wait for audience members who might want to be photographed with a ladyboy or two in exchange for tips.

Noon lives in Bangkok, in her grandparents' house. They share it with her mother, her sister, sister's boyfriend, brother, brother's girlfriend, and two little dogs. Noon is twenty-eight and although she had breast augmentation and sexual reassignment surgery at nineteen, her family still refers to her as "him." When they see her bra hanging on the clothesline, they think of it as an accessory rather than a real bra. Her sister joked that if she has a son she won't let Noon care for him lest he become a ladyboy too. When Noon had a boyfriend, the family still saw them as two men. There was no sadness or anger in Noon's voice when she said her family doesn't see her as a woman. She feels they are a loving and supportive family anyway.

After her transition, Noon worked in a ladyboy cabaret similar to Mambo and entered beauty contests for ladyboys. Now she's "too old." She says that it's very hard for ladyboys to get work because they can't change their birth certificates and so, can never pass. Ladyboys aren't allowed to be monks or nuns, or to run for political office or work for the government. Noon keeps taking courses with the hope of getting better jobs. So far, she has worked as a tour guide, a waitress, and a dancer, but couldn't get a job as an accountant even though her mother works as one and tried to use her influence.

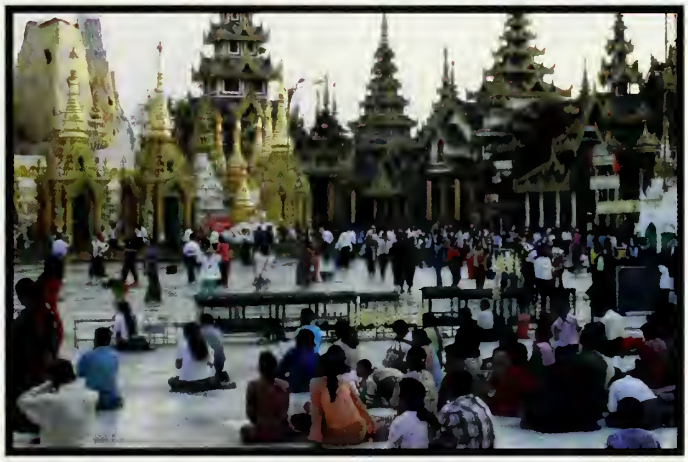
Photography by Mariette Pathy Allen

Wherever we went, people stared at Noon. I wondered what they saw: Were they noticing how nicely she dressed, or how beautiful she is, or did they recognize her as a ladyboy?

As I have started looking at cultures that have a traditional place for people Mainland Americans consider transgender, I have noticed consistent conflation of sexual orientation and gender identity. If a male-bodied feminine man identifies as a woman, he must, automatically, be sexually attracted to men. If not, he can't be considered mahu (in Hawaii) or kathoey, or ladyboy (In Burma and Thailand).

Buddhism has space for "kathoey", or a third sex, but it seems to be a limited position. Kathoey is a more general term than ladyboy whichrefers to young and attractive male-to-females who might be performers or prostitutes. I wonder if there was a greater role for kathoey in the past. Family members seem to resist or be embarrassed by their children if they go in this direction now.

As a Buddhist scholar explained to me, in Thailand and Burma ladyboys are thought to be ladyboys because of their karma. In a former life they did something terrible that caused them to be reborn as kathoey in this lifetime. It is their karma to be kathoey and so they have no choice and are tolerated. Many kathoey say things like, "in the next life I would like to be either a man or a woman but not a kathoey again because it is too difficult." Buddhism is tolerant because as a Buddhist monk once said, "perhaps all of us have been kathoey and perhaps will be again...."



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Two Pills

by Stephanie Bonvissuto

Before me on the kitchen table sit my meds. Just a couple of pills hanging out, so innocuous that if you were heading to the fridge for some Chinese leftovers you would probably miss them completely. The circular one, the larger of the two, is the color of desert sand and stamped with the letter 'G' (presumably the initial of the manufacturer). Its diameter is that of a shirt button and just as easily lost on a busy day. Out on the street corner it goes by the tough-guy name of 'Spironolactone.' Officially it is a 'potassium-sparing diuretic' used to treat patients suffering from congestive heart failure, hypokalemia and certain forms of hypertension. It is also an ingredient found in topical lotion used to combat male-pattern balding. That's because Spiro's an anti-androgen, a testosterone blocker. This is not candy, I've been dutifully warned. Too much can result in potassium poisoning, the major symptom being a sudden fatal heart attack. Other side effects include sterility and, the one I'm concerned with, breast growth. For nearly three years now I've been taking 100 milligrams, twice a day.

The brand name of its smaller, oval shaped partner is Estrodiol. I need only four milligrams of it daily, two in the morning and two at night. My girlfriend, the psych major, patiently explains it's not because Estrodiol is any more powerful than the Spiro but rather, there are many more estrogen receptors in the human body than testosterone, even in one born with XY chromosomes. Therefore, less is needed. I nod along, wondering what other couples talk about over dinner.

These are my hormones. In some transsexual circles they are known as the 'magic pills' and I can attest to why. Under their influence the male body I was born into has been transforming like a slow motion computer generated trick. Very slow-motion, I might add. The process is torturously slow, mimicking the adolescent stage of a teenage girl, but even to the most impatient there's no denying something's going on here. First the skin grows thinner, more translucent, smoother. That first year I felt winter's bite like never before. Breast growth begins; one day you wake up to buds that have seemingly appeared overnight like perennials pushing up through the permafrost. Meanwhile, body fat gradually starts sliding south, the face taking on a distinct female look while that 'spare tire' you've always wanted to shed rearranges itself into hip padding. Hips! I never had to measure them before and do so now with a giddy excitement that makes my partner roll her eyes. She's already lived through this once, thank you very much, and returns to her research paper.

As stated before, any male-pattern balding screeches to a halt and can even be reversed to a limited

"The first modern crossdressing memoir... a smart, sexy story you won't be able to put down."
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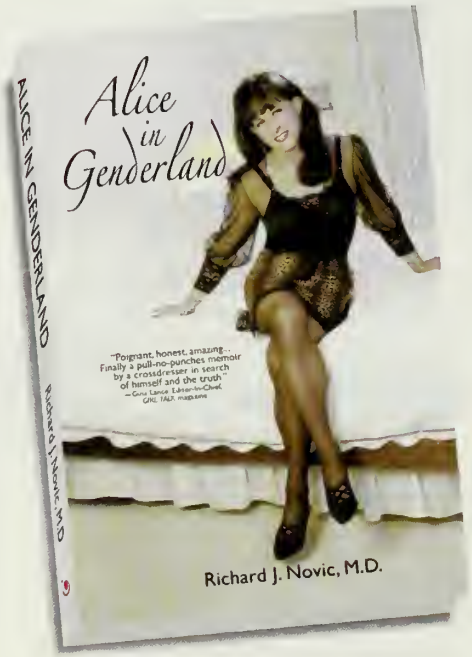

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extent, depending on how late after puberty the hormones are administered. The follicles thicken, amazing even the most skeptic stylist. (I always remember to give mine a large tip after being in her chair). What can I say? It's all those estrogen receptors, tripping over like relays.

How this electricity can be running through my veins I haven't a clue. I don't pretend to understand the exact alchemy going on inside me any more than I can comprehend the exact forces of nature that brought me to this point to begin with. Not that I didn't try to find out in the beginning. I think in the absence of any biological cause for gender dysphoria many transsexuals strike out on the quest to answer the question, 'Why?' Being a trans-woman is such an alien experience it's not only outside the box, it's beyond the geometry the box is based upon. Why? the brain demands to know. This was never in Sex Ed back in high school. There were no merit badges for this in Boy Scouts! Why this, why now, why me?

So I read every article in every scientific journal pertaining to gender, picking through the paltry crumbs their peer-reviewed investigations have left behind. Apparently the authors are only slightly more enlightened than me on the subject. Hmm, some keep mentioning the term 'intersex', the modern-day equivalent of hermaphroditism. I contemplate having my chromosomes checked for any genetic anomalies that could account for an intersex condition but my general practitioner dissuaded me in a tone teachers reserve for the slow students. "You weren't born with ambiguous genitalia, were you? You have all the physical features of a man, don't you? So unless I find an extra organ inside of you, your insurance isn't going to pay for kayrotyping." His mouth flatlines. "I didn't find any extra organs inside of you."

It is only after going down dozens of possible avenues of explanation, only to find each ending in dead-ends, that I reach the conclusion that, for right now, the science investigation of gender dysphoria is still in its infancy. The closest anyone's come to an explanation is the theory that maybe – maybe – the developing fetus is 'washed' in utero by hormones meant for its opposite gender. Maybe.

Finding a reason for this oddly beautiful existence isn't what drives me anymore. Nor is finding the right shade of eye shadow, lipstick or learning how to 'walk like a woman', whatever that means. Some trans-women swear it's all about the presentation, how well they pass in public. I used to think like that, too, until the day I woke up late and ran out of the house without any eyeliner or lipstick on. It wasn't until checking me out in the mirror before lunch time that I even realized my eyelids and lips were bare. That didn't stop me from feeling like a woman. Because feeling 'like a woman' isn't something external but rather intrinsic. Pretty dresses don't make me who I am. Neither does a Double D cup. Or even sex-reassignment surgery. That scalpel won't make me female. Either I am already, having been born a woman born in a man's body, or I'm not.

That's what's happening here, I think, picking up my meds, rolling them between my fingers. These pills are just the catalyst, the match that lights the fuse which in turn burns down through the hole in the keg, even as the long dormant but ever combustible cordite vapors inside the barrel rise up to eagerly kiss its flame. I eye my Spiro and Estrodiol, so quiet and innocent and enigmatic in my grasp. Not for the first time I contemplate where the ultimate power lies here. Is it the gunpowder within or the spark that will set it off or the resulting fire, that all-consuming element of change.

Or, I ask my Higher Power, who I know will not answer and never does, is it in the audacity of that hand that should strike the sulfur and light the fuse to begin with?

Hmm. I smile like Mona Lisa, pick up a glass of water with my free hand, put each pill on my tongue and toss it all back home.

Stephanie Alexis Banvissuto is a forty-something New Yark based authar who lives with her partner and three cats. Her stories and poems have been spatted in www.sapphicvaices.com, Afterburnsf.cam, Aiafe's Kiss, and On Our Backs Magazine, ta mention a few. When nat writing she can be faund in protest marches, planning coffeehauses far her cammunity center, aut an Fire Island, up at The Cape ar learning Italian.

Christine Becker L.I.C.S.W.

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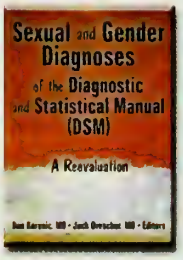

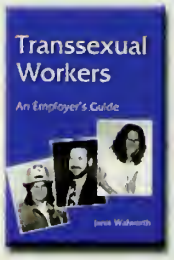

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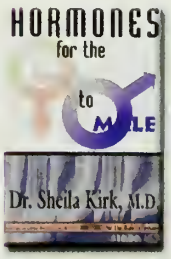

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LANA LITVAK THE CONSULTANT

A Serial Novella Episode Three

by Cheryl Costa

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Revelations

I sat marveling at the sweet paradox of Detective Preston's voice mail; so much so, I played the message several times to make sure I got the facts straight. When I finally got in contact with the detective he instructed me to fly up to Binghamton, NY then drive up to Benedict County to meet with the sheriff.

Benedict County Sheriff's Office

A sheriff's deputy was sent to pick me up at the Greater Binghamton Airport over in neighboring Broome County. Of course this deputy had his front seat full of stuff so it necessitated me sitting in the back seat of the car in "the cage." This was a strange feeling to be riding in the back seat of a law enforcement vehicle knowing that I had not done anything wrong. Equally strange, was that the feeling I got when I saw people looking in the back of the patrol car every time we stopped for a traffic signal.

At the sheriff's facility I was ushered into a large flat office suggestive of mid-century bureaucratic styling, cinder block walls tastefully painted in a non-descript beige.

Behind the desk was Sheriff Herbert Cross whom I had met at one of Auntie Louise's dinner parties. Looking up from his paper work he broke into a broad smile. Getting up quickly he stepped from behind his desk and offered me a prompt handshake.

"Ms. Litvak thanks for coming up here to Benedict County to see me."

Still not clear if I was in trouble I queried, "Did I do something wrong?"

Sheriff Cross busted out in a broad grin, "Honey you are just fine, I just needed to speak to you about something personal."

Oh, oh, this is how it starts. When someone wants to come out to me about their special little hang-up or sexual deviation, this is how it starts. I'm out in the open and pretty damned obvious, so naturally lots of people feel safe cornering me and sharing their little secret.

"Lana, I have a situation here that's going to need some sensitivity and understanding on both our parts."

Ok, here it comes. I'm gay, or my son is gay or my butcher is gay.

"Lana, as you know my people found a murder victim a few days ago," he paused to gather his thoughts, "...at first we thought it was a woman but the medical examiner tells us that the victim is a male."

While I knew he was talking about Ted Littell, I guess I sat there for a moment thunderstruck; this was certainly a new one on me; a murder victim is a crossdresser.

"Sheriff, that's horrible, but what do you want from me?"

He walked over to a desktop coffee maker on top of a three drawer file cabinet, "Coffee?"

I smiled and nodded in the affirmative. Cross poured coffee into a couple of ceramic cups with brand logos from some forensic vendor. After handing me a cup he took a seat next to me.

"Lana, this is a little bit out of our bailiwick. None of my people have ever dealt with anything like this before. We've never had a murdered gay person let alone a transvestite. You're a trans . . . Ummp? . . . well you know."

I knew what he was fishing for. "Trans-person," I quipped.

"Exactly. And to be honest with you, we're stumped."

I sat pondering for a minute. Ok, we have an Andy and Barney size sheriff's department dealing with a potential trans-hate crime; I shuddered at the thought.

Cross took a sip of his coffee and gave me an expectant look. The more I thought about it, after years of making myself the expert on the college lecture circuit, I guess I better 'fess up and put my money where my mouth is.

"Sheriff, how can I help you? I'm at your service."

Cross got a relieved look on his face, "Thank you, hon."

Cross got up and stepped over to his desk phone and pressed a few buttons, as he waited for someone to answer he remarked to me,

"I don't know what NYPD told you but the problem in a nutshell is we've got nothing and the plain truth if we don't get a solid lead as fast as possible the chances are slim to none that we'll catch the perpetrator."

He changed his focus to the phone conversation,

"Bert here, grab your folder on the Littell case and get up here."

Still being puzzled again I asked, "I still don't see how I can help."

"Lana, we need to get into this guy's head, we need to know how he thinks and hopefully figure out where he went and who he met that did this terrible crime."

Of course, this is the same complaint the NYPD had; no profile on the victim. "So, you want to know how a crossdresser thinks?" I asked.

Just then a squatty looking guy

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with a short dark haircut and a thin black moustache walked in with a thick folder under his arm. As he came in he gave me the once over glance. I knew the look. He clocked me as a queer person. From now on the whole rest of the conversation from his perspective was going to be colored in its tone, with respect to me.

"Lana Litvak, this is detective Harvey Patterson."

I offered a hand shake but Patterson just gave me a reserved look. The sheriff was quick to break the chill that had befallen the room and cut right to the chase.

"Harvey, Lana has graciously offered to help us in the Littell case, sort like a profiler . . ."

Patterson cut him off, "Bert, we don't need someone like this. I think it will hurt the case."

Oh boy. This is one of those times, like when your parents used to argue, when you want to be somewhere else, anywhere else but here, because it's obvious this Patterson guy was not happy about the case and even less happy about me helping out. But the sheriff wouldn't hear of it.

"Harvey, look we're not going to be able to keep a lid on this thing much longer and frankly I think Lana can give us insights to how the victim conducted himself," he took a sip of his coffee and then remarked in a afterthought,

"Perhaps she can give us a window in to his secret life."

Patterson stared at the floor noticeably not very happy.

Then he looked up in rebuttal, "Sheriff, are you really sure you want me to share the details of an ongoing murder investigation with a civilian. Add to that if the press gets wind that we've got a transvestite helping us we'll be a laughing stock of the state law enforcement community."

I bit my tongue. If this had been anybody else but a peace officer, I would have jumped in their shit so fast about calling me a transvestite. But considering the circumstances, I figured I had better let the sheriff handle his man. That's when Cross spoke up.

"Harvey you make a good case as always and that's why I like you."

The sheriff turned to me, "Honey, are you still willing to help us?"

I just nodded my head not knowing what to expect.

"Great," the sheriff said with a grin.

The sheriff took a few steps over to me and raised his right hand,

"Please raise your right hand, and repeat after me."

Detective Patterson let out with a groan as the sheriff continued.

"Lana Litvak, do you swear to serve and protect the people of Benedict County to the best of your ability?"

Caught off guard, I stuttered an, "I do."

"Do you further swear to uphold the character and trust, of the fine offices of the Benedict County Sheriff's department?"

Again I said, "I do."

"Then by the authority vested in me by the New York State Consolidated Laws, article 17 Sub paragraph 655, I hereby deputize you as a Special Deputy and authorize you to support the Detective Patterson with his murder investigation."

A feeling of numbness swept over me for a moment. I hadn't taken a serious oath since I was in the Air Force and I haven't said I DO like that since I got married to my former wife Lucrecia.

Detective Patterson just stood there shaking his head in utter disbelief. The sheriff wasn't paying any mind to his attitude attack, he just stepped around to his desk and shuffled around in one of his desk drawers and produced a shiny badge in a small leather carrier.

"Ah, here we go," He stepped around the desk and handed the shield to me with one hand while shaking my other remarking.

"Welcome to the Benedict County Sheriff's department, my dear."

I looked at the symbol and remarked,

"Sheriff, you know I'm only up here on a few days vacation to help out. I have a job."

Cross got a smirk on his face, "Lana, you give the details of your employer to my secretary and I'll make a few phone calls to get you cover with your employer."

Then he turned to Detective Patterson.

"Harvey, take her downstairs and get her a photo ID and fingerprinted. Then give her a complete briefing on the case . . . let's see what she can figure out."

Patterson, resigned to the situation, nodded in the affirmative then asked his boss, "What are we going to do about the press when this all hits the fan?"

Cross just laughed, "Son, our sheriff's department just took a bold step into 21st century Diversity employment practices!" Then with a chuckle said, "Our county HR director will just love this!"

(To Be Continued)

Cheryl Ann Costa is a published playwright and a member of "Sisters in Crime" and "Mystery Writers of America"

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Native American Spirituality: Understanding Gender as Sacred

by Kenneth Dollarhide, Ph.D.
Kean University

While in Washington [DC], We'wha documented Zuni weaving techniques in a series of photographs. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Right-Handed Sun is the warrior child of Father-Sun and Earth-Mother. One day he decided to visit his father. After a long struggle he arrived at the door of Father-Sun's lodge and there he saw a small, crooked worm inching his way to the door.

"Where are you going, little one?" he asked.

"I'm the honored guest of the Sun," Little worm said.

"You?" said Right-Handed Sun.

Little-Worm then explained to Right-Handed Sun that he is responsible for putting the magic into the hoof beats of Father-Sun's horses.

"Cousin, how can you do such a thing? It would take you forever to crawl to the Mountain Where Flint Is Kept."

"You look," Little-Worm said . . . ," but you cannot see."

Right-Handed Sun nodded. "You're right, I cannot see."

"Look again," Little-Worm told him.

Right-Handed Sun looked through the slits of his eyes; what he saw—a beautiful butterfly—danced in the air on flowered wings.

"Remember, one is not always what one appears," Little Worm called out. And then . . . the door opened, and Butterfly, dazzling in soft cotton clothing floated through the blue portals. Then the great door closed. (Tunkashila, *From the Birth of Turtle Island to the Blood of Wounded Knee*, p.32)

Introduction

The idea for this paper came out of reading various transgender / transsexual books and articles and listening to talks and lectures from medical and scientific discussions to biographies and casual conversations with trans as well as non-trans people. In many of these texts and discussions there is an implied but often unstated position—being transgender or transsexual is bad, even evil, but most certainly something to be ashamed of and hidden. To be transgender or transsexual is to be "abnormal" and there is something wrong that needs to be "corrected" by psychological and / or medical intervention.

Euro-American society seems to prefer a biological and scientific mythological explanation for [trans] sex and gender and so the usual way gender diversity is looked at in Western literature is as a 'psychological' or 'medical' problem. This scientific, medical and psychological explanation of [trans] sex and gender is grounded in the mythology of a binary being an immutable fact—one is either a male or a female—and this explanation then allows for 'corrective' surgery and the gender diverse person then becomes whole and fits back into a "proper" place in a binary society. It also allows for "experts" in the medical and psychological fields to be the "gate keepers" and determine who belongs where in this mythological binary construction. In contrast to this rigid Euro-American binary view of sex and gender there are some Native American and other societies that embrace more than this limited and negative view of transgender or transsexual humans. My purpose in writing this paper is to highlight how in a dramatically different manner

Native American societies view transgender people. It is important to emphasize at the outset that this review focuses on Native American traditions that existed in the past often before they were colored and destroyed by the views and values of Euro-American cultures. As a result, unfortunately, many of these traditions do not exist today. I examine these societies in order to highlight how distinct cultures approach both sex and gender in highly orthogonal ways. I start by discussing the conflict between the scientific view of sex and gender that exists in Western thought with the prevailing popular views. I then proceed to discuss how gender and more specifically, transgender people were viewed in various Native American cultures and conclude with a brief discussion of what this means for society and what we have lost as Native American traditions have been destroyed and changed by Euro-American religious values and scientific mythology.

Western View

Because the Euro-American view of sex and gender is grounded in scientific mythology there, is a notion that all people fit into a binary model of sex and gender. There are two sexes according to those who hold to this rigid mythical binary notion, male and female and this is simply a matter of genitalia. Any other possibility is simply an illusion and is not grounded in reality. Sex according to this notion is unchangeable as Dr. Colette Chiland says, " . . . nobody can change his or her sex—sex is not an opinion, it is reality." (Chiland, 2005 : 76)

According to those like Chiland who hold to a biological and rigid binary notion, gender is also grouped as two. There are masculine and feminine genders and these are simply a social and psychological matter and have no objective reality. One can be sexually male and yet have a feminine gender, or one can be female and have a masculine gender, but both sex and gender is always tied to a binary. One can change gender depending upon certain circumstances but one cannot change sex because it is always biologically determined. The only possible exception would be those who are born intersexed, but they too are caught in this so-called objective reality of the binary and are always more or less male or female. This is fine except it happens to be disputed by other scientific evidence. For example, Joan Roughgarden, a biologist, clearly demonstrates in her book, *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People*, "The biology I know tells of endless variation not of a few universals. This endless biological variation is always poking through social categories, spilling over the borders, fudging the edges." (Roughgarden, p.396)

Native American View

In contrast to this mythological scientific binary scheme of the Euro-American there are people in many Native American Tribes and Nations who are seen and understood, not by a binary male or female sexual and gender designation, but as a unique third or fourth sexual and gender designation. There is a more fluid concept of gender and sex among many Native American Tribes because sex and gender is not necessarily understood in terms of genitals or biology but in terms of function and behavior that often comes out of dreams and visions. One's spirit is more important in defining one than the physical body or as an elder once said, "we accept all people for the way they are in spirit." This is a very different reality than that of the Euro-American scientific mythological view.

The reason for this is because many Native Americans see the world differently than does the Euro-American society. Napewasin Marjorie Anne Schutzer, a Lakota winkte and therapist says, "My people have always felt that the Euro-

Photographs courtesy of National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

American concepts of 'reality' are all backwards. As a Lakota it is my belief that this 'physical' plane in which I live is merely a reflection of what is known as the 'real' world, the spirit world if you will. We have always believed that our lives are ruled and directed by what goes on in the spirit world." (Schutzer, 1996: p.2) This notion that the spiritual world is the foundation to understanding the physical world and is what makes all life possible can be seen in the beautiful Navajo Creation story which explains how spirit gives birth to life in the body.

The deities loid o cleon white buckskin on the ground ond loid two eors of corn, one white eor ond one yellow eor of corn ond covered them with buckskin. They wolked around the eors of corn four times. "The white eor of corn hod been tronsformed into the most oncient mole ancestor. And the yellow eor of corn had been tronsformed into the most oncient femole oncestor. It wos the wind thot hod given them life: the very wind thot gives us our breoth os we go obout our doily offoirs here in this world we ourselves live in.

When the wind ceoses to blow inside of us, we become speechless. Then we die. In the skin of the tips of our fingers we con see the troil of thot life-giving wind. Look corefully ot your fingertips. There you will see where the wind blew when it creoted [our] most oncient oncestors out of two eors of corn . . . (Zolborod, p.50-51)

Spirit (the wind) is that which makes all life possible and is the gift from the gods that give life to all life. The ancestors, according to the Navajo creation story give birth first to the twin Nadle, who because they are both male and female are seen as sacred because they can see the totality of life and the world, and the Nadle then invent most of the tools used by both men and women and by doing so make possible Navajo civilization and culture.

Rather than understanding the world as only or primarily a physical reality, Native Americans understand the world from another internal reality. That reality comes from dreams and visions, as Lame Deer, a Lakota Holy Man said, "To us a man is what nature or his dreams, make him. We accept him for what he wants to be. That's up to him."(Lame Deer, 1972 : 153) Many Native Americans think [their] autobiography, [should] include events that they or others have perceived in dreams or visions. Knowledge derived from these sources is of vital importance in determining who one is and in developing a shared sense of personal identity. (Goulet, p.181) Native Americans either self-define as Lame Deer states or are defined in a fluid sense by the family rather than being defined in some rigid manner. For example, the Dene Tha understood reincarnation as a reality and often when speaking in English alternate the third person singular pronoun, 'he' and 'she' when referring to the same person. (Goulet, p.171) This is beautifully illustrated in sexual language when someone wrote on a wall, the following about Paul who in a former life was Denise, a girl, "Paul never broke his cherry. I don't know how to break Paul's cherry, but someday I break his cherry for her." (Goulet, p.184-185) This fluid language allows for a more fluid notion of sex and gender that evolves out of this idea of self-defining and can be seen in the structure of some Native languages. For example, in Lakota the word for man is wicasa and the word for male is wica; the word for woman is winyan and the word for female is win. Winkte is the word for the third gender (in Western parlance male-to-female transgender people). This word consists of two words, the first is win or woman and the second is kte which indicates the future or "to be on the point of something . . ." (Buechel, 1983: p.319) So the meaning of the third gender term, winkte is "to be on the point of becoming woman" or "will be woman." According to the Lakota scholar Bea Medicine there is no historical fourth gender or sexual term (i.e., female-to-male transgender people) in Lakota, as there is no historical evidence such people existed within the Lakota tradition. Alhough there is a history of warrior women within the Lakota tradition and there is a modern term that is used sometimes by the female-to-male trans-

BURYING A PRAYER IN WASHINGTON. A REMNANT OF AN EXPIRING WORSHIP.

gender people and lesbians, *koskalakawin*. This term also consists of two words koskalaka which means "young boy" or "youth" and win which means woman. And so the word has come to mean "young-boy-woman." However, according to the Lakota scholar Bea Medicine this term has no historical significance at all. There are other terms used, but they too have no historical significance but are Lakota words used by contemporary gay people. (Beatrice Medicine, p.5) The Navajo use a completely separate word from either "man" or "woman" to designate the third and fourth sex and gender person. In Navaho the word for woman is aaszaan and the word for man is hastiin and the word that is used for both the third and fourth sexes and genders is nadle which means something like, "in the process of becoming . . ." or "being transformed . . ." (Hill, 1935: 273) The Navajo recognize two kinds of nadle, the true nadle who is an intersexed person and what can be called the pseudo nadle who is a nadle who is not intersexed, both are accepted as nadle and both are treated with honor and respect.

We can examine many Native languages and discover in the language the words used to describe the third and fourth sexes and gender people but what is important to remember is that among many Native American Nations and Tribes one is defined not by anatomy but by behavior, that is, how one functions in society. There is not a denial of biology, it just isn't always very important and sometimes has little to do with identifying one's sex or gender. Many Indian people have always known that sex and gender is nothing more than a social construct and has no more reality than any other social construct. This may be a reason that genitals do not necessarily define where one belongs on a fluid sexual and gender continuum.

Many, although not all tribes, see these third and fourth sexed and gendered people as sacred, spiritual or blessed. However, all tribes do see them as possessing a unique spirit which allows them to be seen in a special way. Consequently, rather than being rejected, they are given a special place within the tribe. This unique spirit arises because these individuals are perceived as having a greater understanding of the human condition and are able to transcend the boundaries of gender norms and see the totality of existence. Unfortunately in some tribes this is less true today than in the past.

Because these cultures are so diverse, there is no one term by which these third and fourth gendered people can be known. Although anthropologists often use the term berdache, a perjorative term associated with being a passive young homosexual, Native people, correctly so, find this term offensive. In the early 1990's Native people came up with the term "Two-Spirit" to replace the term berdache and give the traditionally third and fourth gendered people a positive connotation rather than a negative connotation. (Medicine, p.3) However, the term Two-Spirit can be confusing because it is also used by gay Native Americans and some non-native people to designate being gay, and being a winkte, nadle, bode, etc . . . has nothing necessarily to do with sexual orientation or as someone once said, "being transgender is who you are not who you love" and so I will use the term "Gender-Blessed." I use this term in the traditional Lakota sense as one who receives or is endowed with Spiritual Power (wakan), such a one has been Blessed (yawaste) by the Creator (Wakan Tanka) as the old Lakota say, whenever the Creator gives you a burden, the Creator also gives you a blessing, a way to carry the burden.

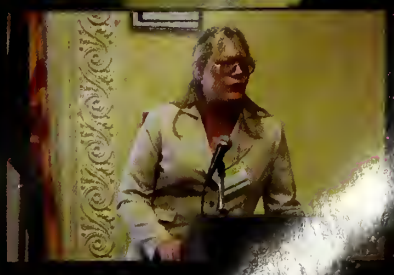
Too often, non-native scholars and even some native scholars insist sexual relations among the traditional Gender-Blessed people are homosexual, but, I think, they are incorrect and make the error of seeing the Gender-Blessed through binary tinted lenses. If one understands the Gender-Blessed as Native People do as defined by their function and behavior then sexual relationships were and are among traditional Gender-Blessed people, for the most part heterosexual and not homosexual. This notion of sexuality among traditional Gender-Blessed people is interesting because among Native American Tribes that embrace a Gender-Blessed tradition these sexual relationships are very complex. For example, it is theoretically possible that two people engaged in a sexual relationship, both of whom have a penis or both of whom have a vagina, could be in a heterosexual relationship or a homosexual relationship or a lesbian relationship; two people, one with a penis and one with a vagina could be in a heterosexual, homosexual or lesbian relationship . . . .there are many different possibilities depending upon whether or not one or both are Gender-Blessed. Defining by behavior and function rather than defining by genitals, the traditional Native American completely transcends the western heterosexual binary notion grounded upon the idea of only male genital and / or female genital sexual relationships.

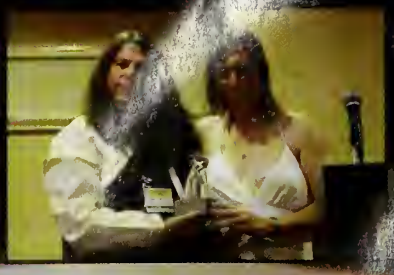
This article will continue in Transgender Tapestry #116.

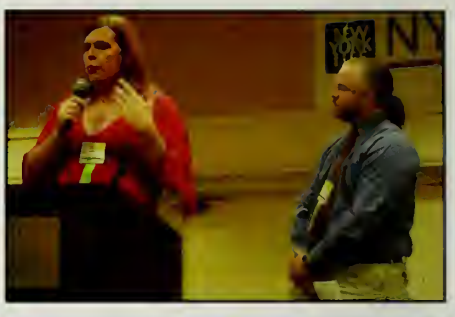
IFGE 2008

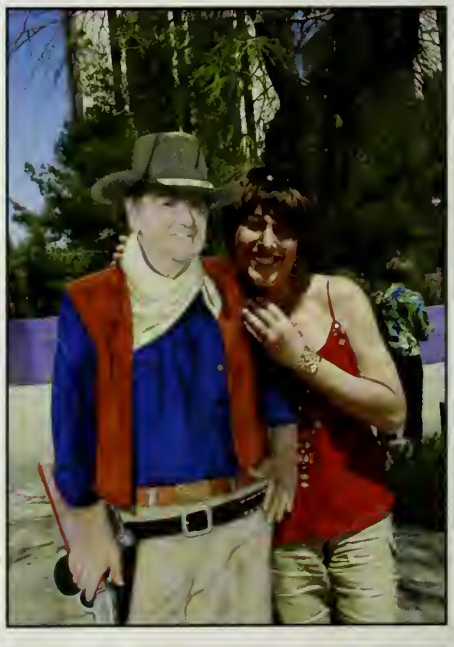
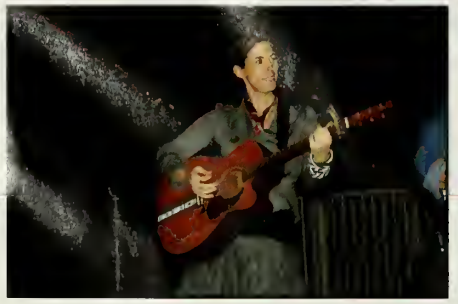
Tucson, Arizona

photography by Mariette Pathy Allen







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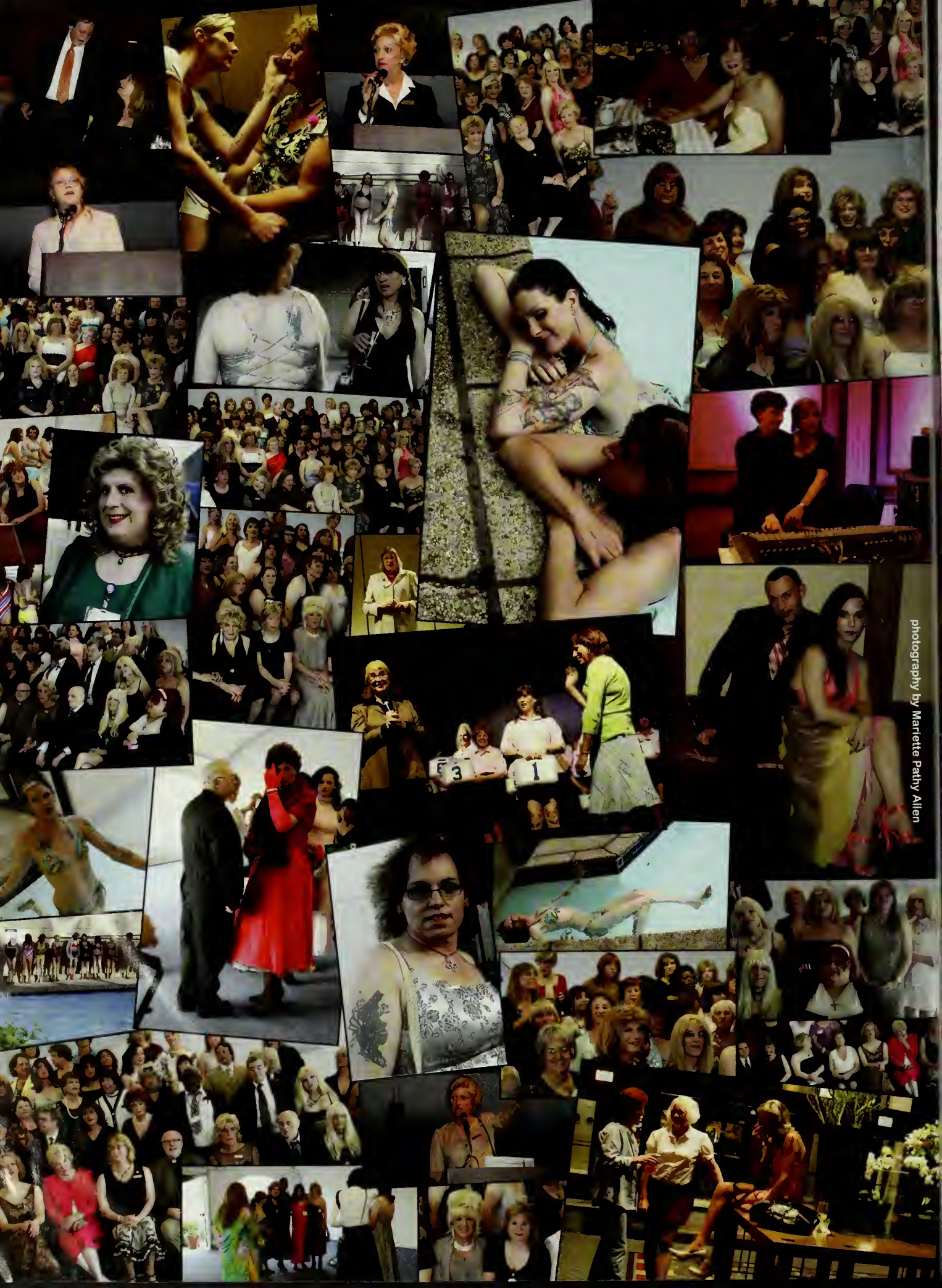

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